

stickhandling

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by [moonlitgarden](#)

Summary

Women flock to Rozanov; he's the gravitational centre in every room. Shane gets it. He's felt it, the shark pull of his orbit. He's been swallowed up into the belly of desire. What he doesn't get is how easy it is for Rozanov. Even with Shane's teammates pooled around him on the dance floor his hands get clammy when a girl in a sequined skirt makes a move on him. Shane used to think maybe he was just awkward; maybe he needed a couple of beers in him to loosen up, but he couldn't do that during the season.

Then Ilya Rozanov kissed him and the craving was so clear in Shane's mind he was able to visualise every sharp edge of it, and he knew he wanted to be on his knees.

2013. It's been two years since he and Rozanov hooked up in Nashville and exchanged phone numbers. It's a month till Boston comes to Montreal and Rozanov's promise of 'next time' could go into fulfilment. Shane Hollander wants to play hockey. He wants to play it well. The other thing is a thing he cannot allow himself to want.

Notes

i've not stopped thinking about shane telling his mom 'i tried really hard but i just couldn't help it' since the first time i watched the scene. growing up asian-canadian in the late 90s/early 00s surrounded by a sport like hockey, i can't imagine he wouldn't have crazy internalised homophobia.

this fandom is so lovely to write for. thank you so much for your kind comments on my last fic; i still intend to get around to every single one once i have the time to. rest assured i appreciate them all so much.

show timeline. takes place in 2013, it should be, a month before shane and ilya have anal sex for the first time in montreal. enjoy!

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

On the road time blurs. It's something that nags at his teammates' sensibilities; the fancy hotels bleed into each other—when it comes down to it every Ritz-Carlton is just another Ritz-Carlton—and the bruises sustained from the ice bloom from a mottled purple to a sickly green-yellow. The miles spent in thin stretched air thinking about the next game, the rubber of the puck and the metal and mesh of the net, pile up. By the end of it everyone's sick of timezones and of neverending KT tape and of cracking knees and of trying to find a strobed light club that the team they're playing hasn't already infiltrated yet.

Shane remembers his first night at sleepaway camp at ten, all of his time out of tune. He borrowed one of the coach's phones and cried on the line to his Mom, small and afraid and shame bursting in the pit of his belly, hoping none of the other boys woke up. Then, once he'd come home, his Mom said: *We'll make a game plan for next time, baby*. Everything has a rhythm, or at least it should. Shane's been drinking the same spinach breakfast smoothie his Dad turns his nose up at since peewee hockey—now with the added plant-based protein powder he partners with, though he'd needed a few weeks and some strong-knuckling to get used to the gritty, granulated texture of it pebbling between his teeth—and he packs his suitcase the same way he has since that first time at camp, his pants rolled tightly and his shirts folded crisply. The habits calm him. They keep him even-keeled, tethered to the ground even after so many days away from Montreal.

It's coming up on the end of their string of away games, and their flight back north is slated for later tonight. Shane's already worked out in the tiny hotel gym, two weeks into a new muscle-burning split to strengthen his quads, and he's showered and exfoliated, focusing very hard on ignoring the soft skin around the deepest part of his body, and now he has an hour to close the circuit of routine.

The bookshop has a chime over the door that peals when he steps inside. It's cramped, a long-leafed ivy plant curling around a shelf overflowing with romance fiction and filtering the low winter light that falls through the dusty window. Shane has to sidestep a stray foot ladder, a sticky-handed kid zipping around his knees and ignoring the futile calls of their father to take it slow, a worn faded armchair. Behind the counter a pink-haired girl in full black clothing and dark-inked tattoos up to her neck is staring into a heavy book titled *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. He smiles to himself. Hockey's hockey—having to road-trip across the entire continent of North America is an unfortunate side-effect of the thing he's moulded his entire life around, thirty seconds on the ice at a time, but this he always looks forward to.

This is the routine. A new city, a new bookshop in a side alley where he won't be recognised, a new thousand-piece puzzle of the skyline for his Dad, and a new book for his Mom.

He shifts through the place till he finds the non-fiction section, empty apart from a woman lost in the political autobiographies. In Pittsburgh it was a psychological thriller set in Berlin, in Philly it was Andre Agassi's *Open*. Shane starts scouring the history books, which give way into anthropology, which give way into sociology, which give way into...

Shane jerks his hand back. *A Queer History of the United States*.

Fuck. Okay. He turns his head to surreptitiously check if the woman standing three feet away from him—who now seems very invested in the text she’s reading about... Obama?—is watching him before he snaps his head back and thinks, *Oh my God, dude, be cool*. Shane clears his throat and stares at another genre, the words swimming in front of his eyes. Right. He’s chill. He can be chill. There are no cameras here. And it’s not like it’s a scoop, anyway. What would the paps even say? Shane Hollander, golden boy centre of the Montreal Metros, caught touching a book about—

He breathes. In for four, hold for four, out for four, like a box. Just the way his Dad taught him.

There’s an appointment in his colour-coded, planned-down-to-the-minute calendar that keeps growing bones and muscle and blood and shifting. After the first time Shane agonised over the entire thing for days. Every time he had to touch his body in the shower he thought about how Rozanov had gripped his pecs in his huge palms, how the golden curls of his hair had brushed against the sweep of Shane’s belly, how he’d opened his skilled mouth and taken all of him into his throat. Shane’s lips get so chapped in the winter. His lip balm is scent-free; when he applies it he remembers what Rozanov tasted like, his soft mouth open and wet against his, their tongues sliding together.

Bodies are one thing. Shane can maybe chalk *that* up to the hormones he boxed firmly away as a teenager, save for a few fumbling and overall pretty horrible instances with his otherwise lovely girlfriend in high school. He’s seen on TV guys sitting circled in the bleachers in Rozanov jerseys. That isn’t the point. It’s the kissing that Shane can’t stop thinking about. How his breath came in pants when Rozanov touched him, and how his body arched up to meet his lips in a lush sloppy kiss anyway.

It doesn’t mean anything. It probably doesn’t *have* to mean anything. On his phone he sees articles about Rozanov all the time: Rozanov in a tight black shirt more off than on, his gold necklace resting askew in the hollow of his throat as he wraps a muscled arm around a gorgeous girl outside of a top-end club in downtown Boston, Rozanov leering at reporters when asked about a girlfriend, Rozanov and the salacious rumours that he has a different girl in each city.

Rozanov’s clearly not, so Shane doesn’t have to be either.

And then he remembers a fleeting touch against the barest part of him, a kiss on the nape of his neck. Blue eyes. *Next time*.

“Oh my God,” comes a dazed voice from behind him, “are you Shane Hollander?”

Shane blinks. The dad that was chasing after his kid is staring back at him, spilled apple juice stained on his shirt. “Um.”

“Fuck, you are!” His voice drops to a hushed whisper. He sounds, Shane realises with slow terror, just like J.J.. “Sorry, I don’t mean to accost you like this, man. But fuck. Jesus, wow, I can’t believe I’m talking to *Shane Hollander*.” Shane’s hands are sweating. He hopes, wildly, that he’s as far away from the book he touched as possible. “I don’t want a picture or anything, I just wanted to say I’m a huge fan. Chuis de Montréal, you know, moved down to

the States for college... anyway, go Metros! I've really got a feeling we'll finally make it back to the playoffs with you, man."

"Thanks." Shane's voice is coming from outside of his body. He grabs a random book off of the display and prays it'll be good enough for his Mom before his PR training kicks in. "Uh, I can sign something if you want..."

The guy waves his hands at him. "No, no, I didn't mean to interrupt you! You just have a good day, dude." He peers at the book in Shane's hands. "Great choice."

Shane glances down. Ken Dryden's *The Game*. He resists the urge to pinch his nose. Fantastic.

Sixteen. Shane was grinding in the OHL after moving back home to live with his parents following a year out with a billet family—the Gauthiers—in Charlottetown. They were nice people; their house was loud and bright and something was always in the oven in the tiny warm kitchen while soup or gazpacho or a rich stew bubbled on the stove. Two other guys on Shane's team lived with them as well, thick as thieves and always going off to play sewer ball in the trimmed, well-kept garden, which meant Shane was left swaying on the outside more often than not. It wasn't anything new. He spent the time reading the bricks of books his Mom shipped him about the genesis of hockey strategy and working on his backhand. Sometimes he sat on the couch and helped Mrs Gauthier fold the neverending stacks of laundry. Shane always had the feeling that he was her favourite, but that was maybe because he didn't trample her roses into the flowerbed.

Either way it was good to move back to Ottawa; his room had been kept untouched—Cens posters neatly plastered on the walls, golden trophies lined up on the top of his wardrobe, his diaries collecting dust in his desk drawer—and the rhythm of home was the same. After dinner every night his Dad still agonised over his puzzles, and his Mom still curled up on the couch with a half-empty glass of white wine to read her biographies, her thrillers, her romances.

Getting used to a new team again, however, was different.

"The skating girls are borrowing our ice today, man," yelled Jacobs to Dubois over the hiss of the water spilling from the showers. Shane stared at his feet and soaped up his armpits, detached. It was a different body gel they had here in the dispensers, citrusy and fresh. He thought he needed another week to get used to the slime of it webbing between his fingers. "You got a minute afterwards? Juliette is *so* hot, I met her at this party last week, I'm trying to..." He made a crude hand gesture. "*Steuplait, mon frère!*"

The guys' laughs pitter-pattered off the white tiles. Everyone was in a good mood coming off of two hard-fought wins on the road and an intense morning practice. Shane was still looking at his feet, bruised and banged up from years of tight-fitting skates and the lengths he pushed them to. The water sluiced off his back in slices; he inhaled and felt the breath roll through his body. Dubois was a showerhead down from him—O'Reilly in between—and Jacobs was standing boxed into the corner past the doorway. There was no way out of this. Fuck.

"Ah, *mon ami*, for you I do anything," said Dubois. He brought his large palm in a slap to O'Reilly's bare shoulder. "You in? The figure skating girls are fucking sexy, bro."

"I got time," said O'Reilly easily. When he looked over Shane felt his gaze slipping down the side of his cheekbone. Shane grit his teeth, glanced up for a moment, then scrubbed a hand over his clavicle. "Hey, Hollander."

"Yeah?"

"I heard you know someone on the skating team."

Jacobs whooped. "Yes, Hollander, you sly motherfucker! Get us an in, dude! What's her name?"

"Uh." Shane busied himself with shampooing his hair, feeling the fine strands melting under his fingertips. "I just know my buddy Joe. We used to skate together when we were kids."

He couldn't help but smile thinking about Joe, how they'd wobbled together out onto the black frozen lake behind the cottage in Lanaudière with their arms linked while their moms watched them from afar. On the horizon the dark loons had been calling, beckoning them closer. Now where Shane bulked up—rounded delts and muscle packed onto his thighs—Joe stayed lean and lithe, the power for his Axels and Salchows exploding from deep within him, his body a further expression of his artistry.

It was jarring. Shane had spent his entire life in tune and out of step with his body. He regarded it in a blank, clinical manner. His right knee, where he'd sprained his MCL when he was fourteen, had been weaker in the flexion while gearing up on the ice back from rehab, so he spent months working on his hamstrings till he'd forced it even again. No hockey player was self-conscious about being naked; this meant that Shane knew the facts about the other guys as well. Jacobs had already racked up two second-grade concussions, Dubois favoured his right side on the power play, O'Reilly's ribs were still bruised from where an enforcer from Brantford had shoved him into the boards last week. Shane needed to know to adjust. He needed their bodies on the ice to propel him forward. His own was just a vessel for good fucking hockey.

"I did not know you swing that way, Hollander," said Dubois, smirking. His long brown hair, usually in a bun on top of his scalp, was slicked down on his neck.

Shane blinked. His heart pulsed in his throat. "What?"

Jacobs flopped his wrist, limp. "You know, bro."

“Um.”

O'Reilly pushed a sigh past his mouth. “Your *buddy* Joe’s a figure skater. There’s no way he fucks girls, man.” He levelled a shit-eating grin at Shane. “Does he wear sequins just like them?”

The costumes Joe wore were waterfalls, deep blue ombré studded with crystals, like those dizzying evenings spent on the lake learning how to skate as the horizon faded from their hands. They were nothing like the pads and mouthguards Shane had to wear for hockey: the ones that shielded his soft fleshy internal organs and protected all the teeth in his jaw. On the ice between line switches he got fifty seconds to execute a play, tops. Every single movement served a function. Every single thing—the curl of the stick and his thighs strong enough to challenge the burn—was streamlined to perfection.

“Sometimes, I guess,” he said, shrugging and turning away.

Jacobs thumped his chest. It was wide, strong. “Must be glad you went into hockey instead of a fairy sport like figure skating, eh, Hollander?”

Shane watched a few droplets trickle down the speckled grouting. The water pounded down on his scalp, hot and heavy, and every gaze in the room was zeroed in on him. Being as talented as he was, everyone either tolerated him and his overwrought neurotic tendencies or they swerved him completely. Even when they swerved they wanted to claw into any soft spot they could find. In Jacobs’ mouth the whites were all jagged shark teeth. His big body tapered off into his narrow hips.

In moments like these Shane always visualised the rink. There was the exact weight of the solid vulcanised rubber the puck was made of—between five point five and six ounces—and the metal of the knives on his feet carving through the ice, then the way time slowed to a crawl and his heart rate stayed solid between his ribs as he lined up for the net, culminating in the large flourish that was the chain reaction of his body: calf flexors tensing, quads and glutes tightening out to his steady core, then his obliques twisting as his pecs stiffened and his biceps and lats and delts closed out the move. His entire body a machine.

One day I’m gonna play in the NHL, Shane thought, and I’ll be so good all these assholes will have to eat my dust.

He arranged his face into a blank expression. He could do this. His mind was cotton; his body had never let him down. “Do you want me to get you an in with Juliette or not?” he said. The boys hollered. Shane braced an arm on the wall and focused on forcing the bile back down into his flat muscled belly, where it lived and hid and didn’t make a single sound.

It hadn't been a lie when he told Rozanov about his... *thing*. Freshly showered, Shane lies back against his plush headboard with a book about the first Soviet players to come over to the NHL in his lap, crosses his feet over each other, and tries not to think about the ticking grenade in an old faded shoebox shoved into the back of his bottom bedside drawer, neatly labelled 2006 TAPES, CHARLOTTETOWN. His touch is the pin to bring it all down.

So—apart from that one stupid desperate time when he'd been thinking about how *big* Rozanov was, his staccato grunts, how Shane had only been able to take half of his cock into his wet wanting mouth, how Rozanov's flat wide fingers had, for a beat, caressed *inside* of Shane—he doesn't touch. Probably he should get rid of it. But he doesn't. It just lives there, in the box that housed the first sneakers Reebok had sent Shane.

A few minutes later, his phone buzzes twice in rapid succession. Shane thumbs at the notifications.

*Hear Boston is coming to Montreal in a month
Hear someone in Montreal is missing me*

Shane frowns, book sliding off his lap. *I don't miss you, asshole.*

*Ah, never said it was you
But now we are on topic
You miss my dick yes
You think about it*

I don't think about your dick, Shane texts back furiously. He chews his lip and doesn't think about the weight of Rozanov's cock stretching his mouth, making his jaw ache and his eyelashes wet with tears. Rozanov had hooked his thumb under Shane's chin as he watched himself slide in and out of his mouth, his eyes hot and lidded, the other hand curling over the back of his head as he'd guided him to take him in deeper. Shane shifts, uncomfortable in his sweats. Unbidden, he wonders how many calories come has. If it has any at all. For weeks after the All-Stars game Shane's body had felt changed, unable to be moulded back into submission by rowing, bicep curls, Bulgarian split squats, anything.

*You are bad liar even over text
Come oooooonnn Hollander
Tell me what you think about*

Where does this guy get off? *Fuck you!*

*Mm I don't think you want that
I think you want me to fuck you
Is what we talked about yes?*

Shane flushes. *Fuck off.*

He shuts his phone and his eyes, breathing. Fuck. That first time Rozanov kissed him, his tongue slipping into Shane's mouth as he held his face in his large palm, the clear intent of it was a cold water shock to his system. The desire between them had been a palpable electric

storm. Shane kissed him back greedily, the same way he got when he was on two goals and there was still the itching unfinished business of a hat trick; he slid to his knees on the horrid hotel carpet and mouthed at Rozanov's cock, out of his fucking mind. Shane had never done it before but he wanted it, nuzzling his nose against his crotch, the pit in his stomach opening up and up and up.

Rozanov in the shower. His wide swimmer-like shoulders, the obscene curve of his pecs, his huge thighs. His large hand on his hard cock. All things Shane has on himself, all things Shane has cultivated carefully, except Rozanov's murky blue-green eyes that make no secret of what he wants.

Fuck.

In the room it's very dark. The sheer white curtains are drawn shut; there's a folded towel in the bedside stand for this purpose. Pump bottle of lube, the good kind, next to the neat row of condoms. All purchases made one by one, spaced out across different days and different cities. Shane's tenting his briefs already; he's so hard he thinks if he just palms himself through his sweats he'll come. But today there needs to be more.

He unfolds the towel, lays it beneath himself, the terry of it soft and grounding. It's not the first time he's done this, not even in the realm of it; still every time the deep ache within himself squirms and jumps and tries to escape. As he circles a slicked-up finger around his rim he thinks Rozanov wouldn't be so coy about this. He would hook Shane's ankle around his shoulder and bend to bite the tender skin on the inside of his thigh. He would lick a stripe up the secret curve where Shane's leg meets his ass, wet and sloppy and unashamed. Maybe he would even put his tongue *inside*—

A moan jerks out of Shane's mouth. A finger slips in to the first knuckle, the pressure of Shane's own touch building against the resistance in his hips. He closes his eyes. He needs to *relax*, Jesus. His breath straggles out of his nose as he pushes the finger in further, into the small clean deep part of himself he tries not to think about, and sighs when he fits the entire thing inside. Just one finger and he's full to the brim, he's empty as fuck, the one-hundred-and-eighty-pound body he knows every inch of is seizing, unravelling. Then another. He crooks his two fingers inside of himself, trying to find the little mound that makes his mind go blissfully blank. Fuck. He glances at his bedside drawer, the ticking time bomb. *Fuck*, he can't.

Rozanov's fingers are rough and a knuckle longer than Shane's own and perpetually bruised. They curl around his stick tightly and give way to his strong wrist and his perfect slapshot. Would he find it easily? Would he take his time, make the act of preparation the pleasure? Or would he pin Shane down and make his body contort to take him inside? Would he pant in his ear, his hard cock settled against Shane's hipbone, those huge biceps flexing, the entire stupid heady masculinity of him enveloping the two of them in brainless fog? Would he use lots of lube, get Shane wet, wet like a girl, and then push himself inside? Fuck, would he kiss Shane when he did it for the first time? Would he want to?

When Shane puts a hand on his cock it takes all of five seconds before he's spilling all over his stomach.

The clarity hits like a trainwreck.

Shane rips his fingers out of himself, wipes the mess off of his skin, lets his breathing come back into his lungs. The curtains are still closed. He doesn't let himself do this on roadies, even when there's mix-ups and he snags a room for himself, even when Hayden's circling the hotel block on the phone with Jackie and the twins. In his nightmares he's always found, torso curled into itself and his face looking marred and crunched and ugly in the throes of pleasure, fingers inside, and then everyone would know what Shane thinks about only when he's weak inside his condo. God, what would the league say if they knew?

Rozanov likes to fuck men. There's nothing on the tabloids, this is something only Shane knows. Another fucking secret. But Rozanov doesn't...

Shane scrubs a hand over his face. It comes away damp. His phone lights up again. It's his Mom.

Hi, honey! Just wanted to check if we're still on for you coming home for the long weekend. You can tell us all about how the build for the cottage is going. Have you been talking to Gagnon about your face-off percentage? I really think we can bump it up a little. And I've got an exciting sponsorship opportunity to talk to you about! Two words: ginger ale! Love you, baby, Dad and I can't wait to see you.

There's a row of hearts following the last text. Shane texts a heart back and idly wonders if he can convince his Mom to let him pay off the last of the mortgage on the house. It's the least he can do, after everything they've given up for him. Fuck. He shoves the lube back into the drawer. He needs to get his shit together.

There's a text from Rozanov on his phone he doesn't read.

See you in Montreal Hollander ;)

"Tabarnak, Hayd, did a lion maul you?" whistles J.J., a wet towel wrung round his neck. He curls his fingers into claws and makes a yelping cat noise. Hayden scowls and chucks a rainbow of mouthguards at him. "Aw, don't bite!"

"Go bother someone else, J.J.," says Hayden, shoving him off. Laughs and jeers and wolf-whistles soar in pitch through the circled locker room. "You motherfuckers better shut your mouths!"

Shane always needs a second for his eyes to adjust to the loud blaring white light in the locker room when coming out of the showers. The cloud of steam he's carried with him dissipates into thin air; now he can see the long nasty red lines carved down Hayden's back. They're already scabbing over. Hayden's face has gone from bright scarlet to a deep purple, looking at no-one while shoving his damp white towel into his bag. Shane's nose wrinkles.

Comeau stops taping his stick across the room and grins. "Jackie's a wild one, buddy, good for you." He waggles his eyebrows. "Can we expect another mini Pike running around in the next nine months?"

Hayden flips him off without any real heat, skin shifting underneath the markings, and says, "We've already got our hands full with Ruby and Jade, man, I hope we get to space the kids out a little more."

The conversation shifts to childcare and how much Drapeau is paying in alimony and child support to his ex-wife—a situation Shane privately thinks could have been resolved if Drapeau didn't insist on riding the line between snarky and asshole a little too tightly—and Shane busies himself with drying the fine strands of his hair and folding his jersey. His shoulder's still twinging from where he slammed it being thrown against the boards by a huge defenseman from Toronto two nights ago. The fear had been a living thing crawling and whimpering inside Shane's mouth, bleeding into the maze of arteries in his body as he'd stared at the popcorn ceiling in the medical room after the first TV timeout, the head of his humerus scraping against his glenoid cavity in aches and bursts. But it wasn't a dislocation. It wasn't anything. The physio handed him a towel with ice in it, his hands big and wide as he wrapped it around the socket of Shane's shoulder joint. Then Shane's body: back to its baseline.

He levels a look back at Hayden, who's still shirtless and is now gesturing animatedly while talking about how Ruby used to spit up any jarred baby food with banana in it, all over her highchair and the cycle of Hayden's old major junior hockey shirts, but how Jade only wanted the banana stuff, or something. The marks on his back are shallow, nothing in comparison to the contusion sprawling down from his pec sustained in a mistimed crosscheck, but still—

It's impossible to play hockey and not come away with a long list of horrors. Shane knows a guy from Charlottetown who fractured his ankle in three different places, a mosaic of brittle bone, now faded away into the threads of real life; Shane himself has his MCL woes, the chipped canine from peewee hockey, the tightness in his hip he's started mellowing out with focused yoga. He's seen every colour a bruise can become tucked away into his body.

In Nashville Rozanov pressed his fingers into the skin just above Shane's hipbones, where it was soft and yielded easily. The kiss came like the speed of an enforcer wanting to slam him against the plexiglass, and then it bloomed into something else. In the lowlight Rozanov's lips looked almost golden, the sounds between them making Shane feverish, the little smacks and sighs where their mouths came together and fell apart, and then Rozanov's deep groans, his drawn-out moaned *fuck, Hollander* when he rolled the entire length of his body against Shane's, like the whole thing was the full-body sport that was hockey. He palmed Shane's pec roughly as he licked and sucked at the untouched skin and the dense muscle spanning

Shane's neck, and Shane felt his carotid leap at the thought of a bruise there, somewhere he'd never been bruised before.

Shane brushes his fingers against his neck. Of course, Rozanov pulled away before his touch could become a visible reminder. Still in the clouded hotel shower mirror, after Rozanov had left, Shane wiped the condensation only to find the hallucination of his desires on his skin. Unmarred but changed.

J.J. slings a huge arm around Shane's shoulders, grinning at him. In the locker room he's always a happy guy. "So, *Capitaine*," he crows, jostling him, "is your shoulder ready to beat those cocksuckers from Vancouver tomorrow?"

Shane stiffens. "J.J.," he says, and then stops. He can feel Hayden staring at the side of his face.

On his folded jersey staring back at him the C is huge. He's neither the standout talent on his major junior team nor the kid who made the goaltender cry into his gloves when he was seven. If Shane tells his boys to do bag skates they grumble but concede. If he says he's skipping going out to the seediest dive bar away in New York in favour of rewinding game tape and making notes for Thériault they roll their eyes but come around eventually with *oh, what a dedicated captain we have, take us to the Cup, frérot!* If he says *keep thirty-five off me*, they say: *how hard should we check him, Capitaine?*

It wouldn't mean anything about him. Good boy Shane Hollander, *decent* Shane Hollander, only the second Asian captain in league history Shane Hollander.

"J.J.," he tries again. Shane's voice is perhaps coming from somewhere else entirely. "Don't say cocksuckers."

J.J. blinks at him. Good guy J.J., who grew up in a Quebecois household and probably learned his hockey English in the snatches of time in locker rooms, during TV timeouts. Shane's heart sinks. J.J.'s hand retracts. Out of his corner of his eye he can see Mitty and Drapeau share a glance. "Okay, *Capitaine*," he says, tenor unsure.

Shane smiles at him tightly. The rest of them don't have the C. "Shoulder's fine. Fucking Vancouver doesn't know what's coming to them."

That sets off a chain reaction of hollers through the locker room. Shane exhales. Later in the shower at home he braces an arm against the wall, shutting his eyes under the spray of hot water, and thinks about the shape of Rozanov's mouth would curl into if he said the word *cocksucker*.

Can you like having sex with a guy without being gay

Shane deletes that search before he hits enter. Even in his mind it sounds insane. What feels like a smooth stone appears in the hollow of Shane's throat, at the idea of the potential answers and the doors that could close.

Instead, he types: *Gay rights in Canada*

That brings up results. He scrolls through them. Ten years ago Ontario—the vast boreal forests and the massive freshwater coastlines, the bears and the loons and the blue jays, the place where Shane grew up—was the first province to legalise same-sex marriage. Shane's windpipe closes, expands, as he thumbs through the photos of the day the Canadian government swept the law into the entire country. Rainbows, rainbows everywhere. The red maple leaf. A woman with bright purple hair crying into her mother's shoulder with a beam on her face. A sign proclaiming FREEDOM = EQUAL MARRIAGE, two guys with hair close-cropped to their skulls kissing in front of it. Shane stares at the photo.

He thinks he remembers the day; 2005, he must have been fifteen years old. At the kitchen table in the sun-drenched cottage, hum of the fridge and wasps buzzing outside the open window in tandem, Shane puzzling over his algebra homework before hockey practice. The radio was on, his Dad was fixing him a snack, his Mom was crossing things off on her checklist. Then an announcer sort of voice, tinny through the speaker, *Today the Canadian House of Commons passed a bill granting same-sex couples equal rights to marriage, becoming only the third country in the world to do so*, and Shane doesn't know if he's recalling it or if his mind is regurgitating the words he's just read in this article, but he definitely remembers the recording of Paul Martin soon after: *We are a nation of minorities, and in a nation of minorities it is important that you don't cherry-pick rights*, and then his Mom turned to his Dad and said...

Shane lets his head thunk against the couch. Fuck, he doesn't remember what she said.

He hesitates. He searches: *Gay rights in Japan*

Not criminalised. Right, that's good. No recognition of same-sex partnerships. Okay. Well. It's not like he's in a *partnership*—

When Shane was drafted to Montreal his entire family—his aunt and two baby cousins in Toronto, his relatives clustered around the outskirts of Osaka and Nagoya—cut together a video to congratulate him. They had cardboard cut-out hearts with his soft-jawed baby-cheeked face on them, Metros jerseys with the name HOLLANDER stretched across the back, clamouring around the camera with wide smiles, caught in the open mouth of infinite endless joy. The boys in the locker room chirp him about the rows booked out in the bleachers with Japanese fans at every home game. Some of them are hardened Metros loyalists and some of them are just in town to watch him, one of their own. They're always beaming, win or lose, storm or sunshine.

He closes the tab. He thinks: *Gay rights in Russia*, and then he thinks: *Ilya Rozanov*.

Shane doesn't need to pull up Rozanov's Wikipedia. He's got the lone throwaway line under his Personal Life section memorised: *Rozanov was born in Moscow and has one older brother; he now lives in Boston.* The general public doesn't know the things about Rozanov that Shane does—his narrowed eyes the split second before the puck drops at the face off even when he's been running his mouth the entire time they wait on the stripes, how his mouth opens and his eyes flutter shut and his voice dissolves into a low *fuck, Hollander, mm* when he comes—but then Shane used to not know some of the things in his Wikipedia article either. Like that Rozanov was born in Moscow, or that he has a brother.

Being a secret keeper, though, is fucking exhausting. Hayden would rib him to no end if he knew how often Shane searches up Rozanov's name. There's the two of them, obviously, and both times Shane had been gnawing his fingernails for weeks on end, paranoid about blurry photos off a hotel housekeeper's phone or black-and-white footage from a security camera, but then there's also larger-than-life Rozanov, who's a better liar than Shane but has no fucking *clue* about being discreet. In the gossip rags he's always seen with women in clubs, women in bars, women in seedy allies with his stupid unsafe orange Bugatti waiting around the corner. Then there's the issue of his *coach's fucking son.*

Jesus. Shane presses the heel of his hand to his eyes, closes them. It's a saying across locker rooms in the NHL that Rozanov has a girl in every city. Shane's heard all about it from one of their D-men, whose major junior league buddy now plays for the Raiders: all Rozanov has to do is dress in that slick black shirt of his with the open collar that dips down to his navel and stand in the bubbled blue strobe lighting of whatever club their boys head out to after the game, win, loss, doesn't matter. Women flock to Rozanov; he's the gravitational centre in every room. Shane gets it. He's felt it, the shark pull of his orbit. He's been swallowed up into the belly of desire.

What he doesn't get is how *easy* it is for Rozanov. Even with Shane's teammates pooled around him on the dance floor his hands get clammy when a girl in a sequined skirt makes a move on him. Shane used to think maybe he was just awkward; maybe he needed a couple of beers in him to loosen up, but he couldn't do that during the season. Then Ilya Rozanov kissed him and the craving was so clear in Shane's mind he was able to visualise every sharp edge of it, and he knew he wanted to be on his knees.

Shane opens his eyes and finds he's typed out: *Can you like having sex with a guy without being gay*

Fuck.

“Do you want more salmon, honey?” says his Mom, digging a spatula underneath a filet in the glass oven dish. It's garlicky, marinated in lemon and paprika bursting underneath his

tongue. Shane's been eating this meal for years, ever since he started growing like a weed out of his skates and pads.

"No, Mom, thanks."

Shane always returns to Ottawa on his days off, like he's being tightly held on a boomerang, and he always does prep work with his dad—rinsing lettuce leaves and julienning carrots—and the cleanup. The routine of it calms him. The kitchen at his parents' place is so lived-in, unlike the sterile granite counters in Shane's apartment where he boxes away pre-planned meals approved by the Metros' nutritionist. Here everything is light-washed wood, warm spotless tiles, basil and rosemary sprigs on the windowsills. Outside in the garden his Dad grows cherry tomatoes and tiny zucchinis. Pots and pans hang from the ceilings; scribbled down recipes on yellowed notes are tacked up on the walls by the metal sink. Shane likes reading the same words he's been reading since he was tall enough to see the handwriting. The recipes date from now and trail all the way back to his parents' college days, back to McGill where his Dad held the defensive zone and his Mom smoked him every time she could sweet talk her way into getting onto the ice. He rinses the dishes, smiles at what must have been his Mom in her mid-twenties commenting in her chicken scratch: *David, that's not nearly enough garlic!*

In the living room he settles into the dip in the worn brown couch, the TV tuned on low into the evening news. His Dad's tackling the newest thousand-piece puzzle, his Mom's engrossed in the copy of *The Game* Shane had to end up buying sheepishly, despite the fact that she's read it a thousand times. He draws the soft blanket around him and pulls up tape from their game against Vancouver, pen in hand.

"Do you remember Wilson, Shane?" his Mom asks. "Oliver Wilson?"

Shane blinks. "From Charlottetown?" Ollie was a tall winger, initially second line but he shot up fast and ended up playing alongside Shane in the second half of that year. He was quite deft for his stature, speedy on the power play, and solid in his physicality. He had wide shoulders, sharp cheekbones, dirty blond hair that looked perpetually windswept. There were rumours about scouts, like there always were. You never got to where they had been if people didn't think you could end up being at least a middling AHL player. That was, of course, until.

"Yes, that's the one." His Mom clicks her tongue. "Poor boy, after that ankle fracture he never was the same. I saw him last week when I was in Montreal to coordinate this whole Canada Dry thing, down by St Lawrence. I didn't recognise him, of course, it's been years, but he recognised me." She smooths a hand out over the page she's reading. "He's at McGill studying law, isn't that wonderful? It must have been such a blow for him, having to give up hockey because of an injury like that. I told him that maybe you could get him tickets for the next Metros home game, honey, wouldn't that be nice? I know you two got along well that year."

"Yeah, Mom, for sure," he replies automatically. Ollie was nice back then. He always had a smile for everyone.

His Dad says from the carpet, “Do you know what you would do if you couldn’t do hockey, Shane?”

Shane stares at him, wide-eyed. “Um,” he says.

Everyone knows the story: when he was three his Mom tied mini skates around his ankles and took him out onto the dark frozen lake behind their cottage, and then Shane pointed to a photo of his Dad with a set jaw and a helmet and a taped-up stick at McGill and said *I want to play hockey*, the first full sentence he ever spoke, after months and months of his parents biting their nails and developmental speech therapists. He doesn’t remember ever looking back. His Mom always says *Shane speaks when he wants to, and when he speaks he knows what he wants*.

“I’m just asking,” says his Dad gently. His parents share a look.

The Robot, ESPN calls Shane sometimes. His whole body primed as a weapon to extract the best out of the forty to fifty seconds he’s on the ice before a shift change. At this level if you ask a player what they’re thinking about when they pick up their sticks they say ‘nothing.’ At this level it’s all reflexes, muscle memory. But Shane’s never stopped thinking. He thinks about percentages when he bends down for the face-off, weight when he feels the puck across his blade, speed when he’s in the neutral zone, angles when he’s approaching the net, and then it’s geometry all the way down. If there’s a millisecond to improve on, he’s on it; if there’s a way to mould his body to gain the edge, he’s doing it. The thinking is what makes Shane the best, the loud rush of his mind constantly switched on, calmed only by the force it wields itself into during the routine physicality of hockey.

He can’t imagine doing anything else.

“I don’t know, Dad,” he says.

His Dad nods, his face kind. “I wanted to sell ice cream when I was a kid.”

That gets a laugh out of Shane. “Why didn’t you end up doing that?”

“Well, I ended up realising that you can’t sell ice cream in the winter, and also that I live in Canada.”

There are a lot of stipulations around dreams. Shane looks over at his Mom, in a dull blue cardigan he carefully selected for her birthday when he was sixteen, her silver-rimmed glasses rounding her face. He doesn’t need to ask her what she wanted to be growing up. He’s never had to. Clustered across the boards in minor hockey most mothers watched their sons’ faces going into checks. But his Mom stood apart from them, her eyes always trained on the movement of Shane’s feet.

She used to say: *Sometimes I watch you play hockey and I think you could do it without skates. I think if hockey didn’t exist, you would invent the sport.*

Now she says, turning the page, “Maybe in the life after hockey my two boys can open a little ice cream stand together.”

In the shush of the night in his boxed childhood bedroom, the stillness of the Ottawa suburbs only fractured by the lazy movement of June bugs and fireflies, Shane thinks about it. He hasn't had real ice cream since the draft; the sensation of coldness rushing to his brain through his jaw, stream-like, has vanished completely. A life after hockey. He touches his chest, his toned stomach, the strong muscles in his thighs. What would it look like? Would he still be grinding in the gym, organising his days by push-pull splits, or would he take up something like long distance running instead?

On his ceiling there's an array of glow-in-the-dark stars from when he was twelve, some peeling and dripping off the walls. At twelve the scouts were already looming in the stands. Shane thumbs at his phone, its blue-light glow straining his eyes, the last message from Rozanov: *Vancouver sucks*. He wonders what Rozanov was like at twelve. At that point he must have already been leaping ahead of the pack. Rozanov doesn't look like he thinks at all on the ice; the way he plays his stick is an extension of his arms, his skates are the soles of his feet. His blood, his veins, his sinewy muscle.

In Nashville, for a moment, Rozanov lapped over the deepest part of Shane's body. Shane squirmed and grasped his curls and gasped, *What are you doing, I'm not clean*, and Rozanov cocked an eyebrow, his mouth slick with spit, and said, *You showered, yes?* Shane felt the heat of burst capillaries across his cheeks and strong nose, covered his face with his palms. *Yeah, but I read... anyway, it could be cleaner*. Rozanov, pupils overblown and teeth sharp and white, had spread his tongue over Shane's cock instead, and said: *I do not mind*. His eyes, dark and honest. *But I don't do anything you do not want*.

"*Capitaine*, you made it! Come dance with us, *ici, oui*, celebrate your hat trick!" J.J.'s sheer silk white shirt glows in the dim blue lighting of the club, through the crush of bodies on the dance floor. A heavy sensual bassline thunders through the walls. In and out white lights strobe in Shane's eyes. J.J. presses a radioactive-looking cloudy pink drink with a straw into his chest. "Here, this has some non-alcoholic raspberry shit in it, I know *Le Robot* does not get wasted during the season, no?"

Shane grips the slender stem of the mocktail very close to his chest and smiles, uncertain. "Thanks, J.J.," he says as he's ushered towards the rounded booths in the back. Shane makes it a point to come out after a shutout, show his face for an hour, knowing this—and the squabbling team dinners pulling up at the end of a roadie and the torturous bag skates on the ice—are where the handles of the Cup are forged. He squeezes past a girl in a tiny glittery top writhing to the music. Hayden had begged off, citing Jackie and the twins, and now Shane's out of his skin.

Drapeau is cosied up by the side of the table, sloshed, still knocks back a shot. “Ah, you had a good dinner with your buddy?” His grin is wide; he makes a big show of looking at his diamond-studded Rolex. “Coming out after nine, *Capitaine*, to what do we owe this honour?”

There’s a script for this, thankfully. Shane lifts his glass in a sort of *fuck you* gesture and takes a sip, the sweet tang of the grapefruit—not raspberry—hollowed in his cheeks, and Drapeau laughs loudly and thumps him on the back and drowns himself in another two beers, and they’re off to the races. Shane’s squashed between Comeau and Mitty; through here he has a clear view of the bar. It’s all shoulders and the sides of faces. The bartender’s in a black mesh shirt, strong jaw, wielding a two-piece silver shaker effortlessly.

At some point Shane’s drink gets lost in the flush of glasses on the table. It’s a good excuse to slip out from where Comeau’s getting noisy and J.J. keeps pestering him to come dancing. In the deep dark of the club hopefully nobody can recognise him. He breathes. Just another half hour of listening to the slur of English and Québécois and the boys talking about Chel and their wives.

The bar counter is sticky underneath his fingers, cork coasters strewn across the surface. The bartender, who’s just finished sliding someone a dish of olives and an elaborate-looking crystalline drink, turns to him next. Under his jaw there’s three-day-old stubble. He grins at Shane, his teeth very white. “What can I get you to drink, gorgeous?”

Shane blinks. His face is suddenly hot. The guy’s hands are very big. He clears his throat and says, “Just a ginger ale, if you have it.”

“No ginger ale, I’m afraid,” says the bartender. “Club soda okay?”

Shane nods. His mouth is dry. He sips the drink, forces it down, finds it does nothing.

The guy squints at him. Here in the lowlight of the bar Shane can make out a gold necklace at the dip of his throat. “You look really familiar, man. You come here often?” When Shane shakes his head, he smiles again. “Fair enough, doubt I’d forget a pretty face like yours.”

In terms of come-ons it’s pretty artless. Last time at a club on one of their longer roadies there was a lithe girl with her blonde hair in ringlets who danced with Shane in the tide of the dance floor, her huge jade hoop earrings dangling every time she brushed against him. Shane remembers being on the outside of his skin, feeling watched, observed, agonising over every minute expression on his face. When she leaned in closer to him, her hands snaking underneath his light T-shirt, and tilted her face up to kiss him—it was fine. Her mouth was soft. She smelled of cherry; she left a pink-purple kiss on his cheek. He ducked out not long after, sweeping into the unlit back alley of the place, and threw up on the ground.

Now this bartender looks at him, a smile resting in the crook of his mouth, and his gaze settles on Shane’s lips. He’s got good wide shoulders. Thick arms. The pull from behind Shane’s chest is not unfamiliar.

Fuck.

Shane slams down a few bills and clears out. Not even J.J. puts up a fight when he bids his farewell. Outside the cool Montreal night carries a sharp scent of petrichor; when he looks up he sees a huge grey cloudburst gathering along the city's skyline. He shoves his hands in his pockets and keeps walking through the strings of people hurrying home from work, going out to dinner, living normal fucking lives. On the curve of the road where he gets his phone out to book an Uber there's a huge billboard advertising the Metros' next game. There: his freckled face, larger than life, obscured by his blue helmet, blocking out the crescent moon. It's like looking at a whole different person.

At home, after his warm shower and his ten-step skincare routine and his brushed teeth, Shane buzzes in bed. He needs a run, maybe. A straight shot down busy de Maisonnueve if he were someone else, or the trails winding around Mont Royal. Probably he needs the gym. Definitely he needs the ice under the blades of his skates and a stick between his hands.

Then his phone chirps.

*Tampa is very bad wow
Still nice hat trick Hollander*

The club, the bartender, Rozanov's crosscheck into the boards on the road against Boston; in Shane's body all this replaces his blood. He swipes the notifications away.

A new one pops in. *Who is that guy*

Shane frowns. He reads, then re-reads the text. *What guy?*

*The blond guy in your seats I see him on ESPN
Only Mama and Papa Hollander sit there yes?
Even Canada's golden boy can have family problems))))*

Fuck off, replies Shane, my parents are on vacation.

*OK
Who's the guy*

Shane's eyebrows knit. What the fuck does he want? *Old teammate of mine from when I was in juniors*, he sends.

For a moment during warmups, slipping his mouthguard over his gums, Shane's heartbeat was a horde of pounding horses in his chest. Ollie was sitting there alone in a thin scarf and a blue Metros jersey, the back thankfully blank; he was meant to bring his girlfriend, but he'd told Shane over text that she had been pulled into a last-minute work trip to New York. She'd just landed her first job in marketing, he had told Shane proudly, and Shane had sat in the back of an Uber and wondered what it would be like to have someone tucked under his heart to brag about. Shane tried to keep his hands still, flipping the stick between his palms, knowing realistically the entire thing would be a drop in the huge pool of NHL coverage tonight. The Raiders were playing the Admirals, after all, and looking to crush their curse of losses at Madison Square Garden for once and for all. It would be stranger if Shane didn't

acknowledge Ollie. He shook a chattering Hayden off and drifted around the ice, slowing to a stop next to Ollie, whose eyes were bright behind the plexi.

“Thanks so much for the ticket, Hollzy, this is awesome,” he said, grinning. “We still on for dinner after, yeah?”

Shane just nodded. In his dark blue CCM-sponsored helmet and the beat of the Metros’ logo over his heart, holding the C and about to take to the ice on the first line in front of thousands of people, his whole body was suddenly static. Ollie was still smiling, eyes now trained on where the wingers were running through some last-minute drills. If Shane couldn’t play hockey he didn’t think he could stomach watching anyone else do it.

His phone vibrates again. This time it’s a ring.

“Why the fuck are you calling me?” hisses Shane down the line. Outside the storm is breaking, rain shattering against the huge windows. In his high-rise, room cocooned in the bottomless dark fractured only by the intermittent bursts of white lightning, Shane’s in the eye of it all. It rattles in his teeth. “Rozanov—”

Rozanov’s voice is deep, smooth. “Why did you pick up?”

“Fuck off, I’m hanging up.”

“Hollander,” he whines. Shane’s hand flexes on his thigh. “Come on. Your *teammate*, I do not recognise him. He plays in maybe AHL or ECHL or something, yes?”

“You’re such an asshole, oh my God.” Shane shakes his head. Under his skin the buzz is still catching flame. “He didn’t go pro. Wiped out with a pretty horrible ankle injury when we were fifteen. Never got back on the same level again.”

There’s a beat of silence on the other end of the line. Rustling. Then, “I am sorry to hear this. You are good friends?”

Shane blinks. “Uh, not really.”

Rozanov scoffs. “You are bad liar, Hollander. TMZ has photos of you having dinner.”

TMZ has photos of everything. Shane has taken to speeding up around any big long-leafed bushes and avoiding seats by frosted windows at restaurants. “You’re one to talk,” he says. Thunder growls outside. “TMZ probably makes forty percent of their profit from you and your stupid Bugatti. Why are you obsessed with Ollie?”

“*Ollie*.” Out of Rozanov’s mouth the name sounds like a spit bullet. When he speaks again the words are low, a purr. “Your hat trick today, hot. You have been working on your backhand, yes?”

In Shane’s briefs his traitor cock twitches. “Yeah.”

“What are you wearing?”

“What?”

Rozanov sighs. LA, that first time, his tiny pleased exhale when he came up for air after swallowing Shane’s come. For a while something of Shane’s was *inside* Rozanov, their bodies normally pitted against each other—Rozanov stronger, Shane faster—suddenly one. “I am asking what you are *wearing*, Hollander.”

Cocksucker, he thinks. Then the bartender, the thrum under Shane’s skin that gives way to pure muscle. Shane shuts his eyes. “Just a T-shirt. Sweats. Briefs.” How likely is it that someone who knows hockey would be tapped into this line? “You?”

A pause. “Nothing.”

Fuck.

In the showers Shane keeps his eyes to himself. In juniors it was competition, it was insidious, it was hot burning hell. It wasn’t gay if you wanted to prove you were the biggest. It wasn’t gay if it was hazing. It wasn’t gay if you were curious about the one Asian guy and if what the stereotypes propagated was true. Now in the locker room scrubbing off after a rut of line shifts is perfunctory shit. Mitty gets chirped about his lavender-honey soap he and his wife made on their date night, J.J. yells loudly over Loco Locass thumping through the speakers, and Shane stands in the corner soaping up his torso. Only there was an in-between in LA when Shane had looked, and Rozanov had looked right back, nothing in his eyes except the rapidly vanishing blue-green-hazel of his irises ceding control to his dark, blown up pupils.

“Oh,” he says.

Rozanov laughs, a short bark of a thing. “Are you hard?”

The ache inside of Shane bleeds, spits teeth. He palms a hand over his cock, puts the phone on speaker. Here there are no neighbours. “Getting there.”

For a moment there’s nothing but rustling. Shane’s whole body is a livewire. Rozanov, the strong line of his shoulders, his biceps flexing and curling as he pumps his hard cock. In LA he growled after coming, pulling Shane by the back of the neck into a hard, possessive kiss. God. Shane wants it in his mouth, he wants to swallow, he wants Rozanov to haul him in by his glutes and—and—

Rozanov says, breath caught in his voice, “Are you thinking about me?”

Shane bites his lip. “Yeah.”

A low moan. “*Fuck*, Hollander.” There’s the dry slide of skin against skin, then a pop of a cap. It sounds like it’s raining in Boston, too, hard and heavy. “Tell me.”

“I...” He shouldn’t be doing this. He should be asleep. In his colour-coded schedule tomorrow’s morning is blocked out in green, which means brand deal commitments. He’s to

wake up at six-thirty and jet across the streets of Montreal to a warehouse to film a Canada Dry ad. It's all noise in Shane's ears. "I think about your cock."

"You want it, yes?"

Shane whimpers, pressing the heel of his palm against his cock. Fuck. He shoves his sweat-soaked briefs down, getting a hand on himself. "Rozanov," he gasps. His name is so bitter, so fucking sweet. "I... I..."

Rozanov groans. "Are you touching yourself?"

"Mhm."

"Fuck." It's drawn out. "So fucking hot. You know what I do if I'm there?"

Lightning scores the sky. "What?"

"Lick you down there where you are pretty. Then put my fingers inside of you." Rozanov's words pool in Shane's belly, sting up Shane's cock. He can't *breathe*. Does it always feel this good for everyone else? With his high school girlfriend he could never shake loose the itch to perform. "Want you to beg, Hollander."

Rozanov's hands are as big as his, have the same callouses from years of stickhandling. Jesus. Shane's hand is working faster now; he's so *wet* at the tip of his cock. If Rozanov were here he probably wouldn't think at all. He would hold Shane's chin in one huge palm and kiss him. He would do everything Shane's too scared to want. "Beg for what?"

"My cock inside you." The idea of it makes the whole room tip into darkness. Shane's fucking feverish. He can't see anything. Around him is only this small tunnel of pleasure, of his hand stroking his cock and Rozanov's voice in his ear like sin. "You want it, don't you? Need me to fuck you, yes?"

"Holy shit, oh my God." Rozanov inside of him, the thickness of his cock forcing Shane open, their bodies making something new together. Shane had a dream once where he centred Rozanov who was on the right wing, the two of them in Metros blue-and-red, shifting the puck up and shaving it towards each other. In the dream he was able to feel his every move. Like he would if Rozanov were to press inside of him, hands gripped tight on Shane's ass as he slid his cock in and out. Fuck. The whole world coils in Shane's gut. Shivers break down his spine. "Mm, Roz—"

"Better than your dildo, no? I'm bigger."

Shane exhales through his nose. "Asshole," he says. His hole clenches. God, it's in the drawer next to him. There's a vein that runs alongside the underside of it, the same as Rozanov's cock; in Nashville when Shane hollowed the flat of his tongue against it Rozanov's hips jerked, a stream of pre-come spilling out of him. He wants—he *wants*— "You are. Jesus Christ. You felt, mm, you felt so big in my mouth."

Rozanov's accent thickens. "*Fuck.*" He groans. "Are you—"

It's so pathetic. Outside the rain comes down in sheets. Inside of him there's still a cavity yawning and gaping open. "I'm close," he gasps, spitting into his hand to ease the way. "Come on, Rozanov."

"God, want to fill you," he growls, and Shane can feel him inside of him, he presses his thighs together, there's a pit in his belly that doesn't let up, it's choking him, it's suffocating him alive, and— "Oh, *fuck*, Hollander."

Shane comes, spilling hot all over his fist and the sheets. It's like lightning's struck him. His body coils tight, every limb of his still singing desire, listening to Rozanov's strangled breath down the line, and through all of it—the life he conjured since the moment he could talk, how all of it has brought him here, to the glory of the NHL, the sequined fame that is its byproduct, this expensive high-rise apartment in a city housing one of the best hockey franchises to ever exist, dinner with his loving parents tomorrow and his day off full of pencilled-in sponsorship obligations—he finds for a moment he *wants* so much it's just like that first day at Timbits, helmet sequestered around his head and puck hovering at his skates and the keen knowledge that this game would never just be a game to him.

They meet Boston in three days at home. The Bell Centre's already buzzing with tension when Shane makes his way home after morning practice where they'd run through a variant of the power play with an overload. They're polishing the whole damn place; on his way out he spots about three new janitors he hasn't seen before, and Shane makes it a point to remember every employee's name. The city's an unsprung bomb. Everyone fucking hates the Raiders here. Shane's seen the huge poster sponsored by the league in Sainte-Catherine, a shaky photo sent into the family group chat by his Mom, of him and Rozanov at the face off at centre ice. In it Shane's razor-focused on the puck. Rozanov is grinning at him.

He remembers the moment. This season at TD Garden. Rozanov leaning down, his voice like butter. His eyes, always pale blue on the ice, like a shark. *Need someone to show you good time, Hollander?*

At home in bed Shane presses a cold hand to the violet bruise spanning from his hip to his armpit, watching the flames in his fireplace flicker. It was a clean hit in the second minute of the first period by a hulking Detroit enforcer, sending him skidding into the boards. He'd needed a moment to rise. When he did, like he always does, the crowd started a roar that came from its underbelly. Bruised ribs, probably, but Shane played it off with the medics. With the Raiders next they need him. He's not in the business of letting people down.

On his phone there are a few new texts: Hayden inviting him to dinner at the Pike house, the Metros team-wide group chat filled to the brim with links to sleazy articles about Rozanov,

and Ollie, who's sent him a frayed photo of a tiny floppy-haired kid in pads and skates, grinning toothily at the camera.

*My mom's been going through childhood photos and she found this LOL
From my first time at sleepaway camp I think I was eleven. I remember it was so fun. Did
those puck handling drills for years. When did you first go man?
Also hit me up in the offseason we've got to shoot some pucks together. I could keep up with
you back then but you'd smoke me now LOL would still be a blast*

That phone call from sleepaway camp is something that is still sometimes a residual echo whenever Shane's on the road. His sticky face covered in tears, one of the coaches hovering awkwardly by the doorway that let out a slit of yellowed light into the hallway from the room Shane was calling his Mom from. All of his routines shot to bits, the panic a vice around his throat. The next day in the cramped cafeteria, knocking elbows with the twelve-year-olds at about nine, paranoid someone had heard. *What's wrong, Shane?* his Mom had asked on the phone. Shane, in a small wail: *I'm scared*. Then, after some shuffling on the other line, some breathing, his Mom had said gently, *Anything worth doing is scary, baby*.

It strikes Shane. Fuck, his side hurts so much. Three days. After that phone call Rozanov had texted him: *Give me your address in Montreal*.

It's still burning his phone up.

Shane glances at his bedside drawer. He shouldn't.

But yesterday against Detroit he stood up and fought down to his teeth in a tight game threatening to spill into overtime. Shane scored with thirty seconds left on the clock and iced out the rest; in the news circuit overnight and today morning everyone is talking about *The Robot*, the one who executes and functions and drags his team over the line. The wall of noise that wells up every away game, the jeers, the hollers, none of that bothers Shane Hollander. The storm pressure of a looming shutout or potential overtime doesn't get under Shane Hollander's skin. Shane Hollander moves in his own silent orbit. In that silent orbit there is only the puck, the ice, and the net.

He winces. The bruise is developing hands and fingernails and clawing under his skin. In LA, Rozanov cupped his cheek in his huge warm palm and drew him into a gentle kiss; in Nashville, he covered Shane's whole body like a heated, weighted blanket.

Shane looks at the drawer again. God, but that one time had felt so good. To do it that first time there had been a routine. Steps to follow, scrawled down on a torn leaf of paper and passed through the shredder afterwards. There is a rhythm to everything.

You want it, don't you?

Fuck it.

Shane's diet is clean. This morning he had a huge glass of green tea. Under the sink there's a cupboard with fresh towels, hiding the basket in the back that has a stock of water enemas and—purchased in Nashville, Shane out of his mind—Metamucil. In the shower the water is

a hot stream, fogging up the huge round mirror so Shane can't look at himself. He stretches. He uses an enema. He packs a tea towel full of ice to his long wisping finger-like bruise and wipes the glass clean of its condensation. In it the reflection hasn't changed. It's still him. His hair flopping over the front of his scalp, his artless brown eyes, the downturn of his mouth.

On the bed he curves his back. The first finger is easy, the second a tough fit, the third impossible. But Shane's seen Rozanov's hard cock, the length of it, the veiny underside Shane drooled around in Nashville, and he knows he has to take it if he wants it. So he takes it. The third finger slips in after rubbing its blunt tip against his rim for a few minutes and Shane *whines*, the sound bleeding straight from his throat. "Holy shit," he breathes, rubbing inside of himself. "Ah..."

When it gets very late Shane looks at those articles. There's one with a blurry picture of Rozanov leaving a fucking *wine bar* in New York with his arms wrapped a around pretty girl with coiled brown curls, his massive hands spanning her tiny waist like they belong to each other. But ESPN, the poster on Sainte-Catherine, their bodies against each other.

He fishes the thing out of his drawer. Not the nine inches Rozanov lies about, but big enough. It's pink, veiny, high-grade silicone. Shane scrambles for the good lube, rolls a condom over the dildo, slicks it up.

It's a fucking *stretch*. Shane takes a few breaths, centres himself, squeezes around the tip and holds. Then he pushes. When the head pops the rim he's full up to his fucking throat. "Oh, fuck," mumbles Shane, grinding down on it. It's a little cold. Rozanov's a fucking furnace; when they get close on the ice Shane wonders how everything isn't melting around him. He would be so *hot* moving inside of him. In the pit of Shane's belly a sudden hunger stokes to life. He thinks he might be starving. "Fuck, holy shit."

It shouldn't feel this good. Around him there is only the fog of imagination, the curiosity of how Rozanov would give it to him. He seems like the kind of guy who'd want Shane on his hands and knees, face smushed into the pillow, watching the place where they join and the place where Shane takes it. He rocks back on the dildo, feeling its thickness inside of him, how it presses on the spot that makes the whole world amplified. Fuck. He could take it so fucking well. He's so full. Shane *wants*—he *wants* Rozanov to fuck his cock into him. He wants to feel him shudder inside of him. God, this whole thing is huge and chipped golden; he wants to feel if it wrecks Rozanov too.

It only takes a hand on his cock for a couple of strokes and the memory of the taste of Rozanov's skin for Shane to come.

The cleanup is involved. After the ice Shane always needs a moment to return to himself from the clouds, to shed the myth of Shane Hollander. Now he lies back and feels threaded into the world that normally eludes him. Grounded in his body. He's here, he thinks, in the epicentre of the life he's willed into existence, and there's a string to pull so it isn't all fucking miserable.

Shane picks up his phone, bites his lip, and texts: *I want you to fuck me.*

Three days later and deep into third period with five minutes on the clock they meet at the face off. Marleau's stewing in the box with a minor for tripping Hayden and now they go on the power play. *Overload*, thinks Shane, the game tied at three-three, and then Rozanov bends down at centre ice, setting his world aflame.

Shane keeps his eyes trained on the ice. He doesn't want this to go into overtime. He wants to win, like he always does; he wants to play good hockey, like he always does; he wants Rozanov, maybe has done for a long time now.

In his skates he can feel the flex of his feet. His core tenses, the rest of his body just waiting for the trigger to make the move. This is simply a machination. It's when he pulls up in front of goal that the magic happens: a deke, forehand, backhand, shot up, then the rest is only force and gravity.

Rozanov rolls his mouthguard over his teeth. "Ready for later, Hollander?" he murmurs.

Shane grins. "Catch me if you can, Rozanov."

The puck drops. Shane's body reacts. Go.

End Notes

shane purchasing metamucil, a completely normal fibre supplement lots of people take: fuck the cashier is going to know i want my arch rival's dick in my ass.

shane saying 'i want to play hockey' is inspired by [harry kane's 'i could crawl. i could cry. i can swim. i want to play football.'](#)

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